

Subject: PABIODIV: WTO: Otters are here to stay
From: Kirk Johnson <kjohnson@pawild.org>
To: <pabiodiv@webmail.upb.pitt.edu>
Date: Thu, 31 Mar 2005 20:27:46 -0500 (EST)

Warren Times Observer, Saturday, March 26, 2005
Otters are here to stay
By DEAN WELLS, Times Observer Staff Writer

It appears the playful river otter has become a permanent fixture in Pennsylvania once again.

Hunted almost to extinction and driven from most of their natural habitat by pollution nearly a century ago, the state's river otters barely maintained a hold in Pennsylvania. The remnants of the population was found in the Pocono region.

That all changed in 1982 when various state agencies, universities and private groups endorsed Frostburg associate professor Dr. Thomas Serfass's plan to reintroduce river otters statewide.

Last Monday night, Serfass gave a presentation at the Warren Public Library outlining the progress of the reintroduction. "This has been a massive effort to get this animal restored," Serfass said.

Over 4,000 river otters have been reintroduced in 21 states. Reintroduction began in Pennsylvania in 1982 with the placement of four otters in Kettle Creek in Potter County. River otters were reintroduced into the Tionesta Creek in Forest County between Mayburg and Kelletville in 1990.

Since otters are nocturnal and rarely seen by humans in the wild, different methods were needed to track population growth. Serfass determined by counting river otter scat and other sign, population growth and expansion could be estimated.

Serfass and his assistants use the "latrine" method: identifying spots favored by otters as places to drop scat. This includes rock outcroppings, conifers, backwater areas and peninsulas. From March 2001 to March 2002 Serfass had a graduate student walk Tionesta Creek between Mayburg and Kelletville to look for latrine sites and otter scat. In addition, remote control cameras were set up near latrines.

"We've had very good luck with these cameras since we've gotten the hang of it," Serfass said. "We have evidence that (otters) are persisting (in the Tionesta)."

The accidental death of an otter recently provided Serfass with more proof that otters have taken hold in the Tionesta. A small female otter was killed in a beaver trap near Kelletville and, while a disappointing loss, the otter's death provided some interesting data. "She was released in the Mayburg area 10 years ago," Serfass said. "It's encouraging to see she was still in the area."

--

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness
220 Center Street
Warren, PA 16365
(814) 723-0620
alleghenyfriends@earthlink.net
<http://www.pawild.org>